United Nations A/55/PV.75

General Assembly

Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

75th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 29 November 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 41

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/55/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/639)

Draft resolutions (A/55/L.45, A/55/L.46, A/55/L.47 and A/55/L.48)

The President: I first give the floor to Mr. Ibra Deguene Ka of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/55/L.45 to L.48 in the course of his statement.

Mr. Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): It is always an honour and a pleasure for me to take the floor in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People during this annual debate in the General Assembly on the question of Palestine. It is also a pleasure to take this opportunity to congratulate you once again, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the Assembly and for the talent with which you are conducting our work during this session.

The item we are discussing today was first brought before the General Assembly in 1947. In the years that followed the adoption of the resolution on the division of Palestine, the question of Palestine and the rights of the Palestinian people remained overshadowed by the conflicts and hostilities that broke out in the region and were mainly discussed as part of a larger Middle East crisis or treated as a refugee issue. The item was re-introduced in the agenda of the Assembly in 1974. That same year, the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were reaffirmed and spelled out as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and regain the property that had been stripped from them.

A year later, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established. The General Assembly authorized the Committee to spare no effort in promoting the implementation of the Assembly's recommendations. It requested the Committee to keep the situation relating to the question of Palestine under review; to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; and to promote the dissemination of information on its recommendations through non-governmental organizations and other appropriate means.

Over time, the Assembly has gradually expanded the Committee's mandate to include new activities. New members and observers have also expanded the ranks of the Committee. For the past 25 years, through

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

00-77083 (E)

the means available to it, the Committee has indeed spared no effort in promoting the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights — its eternal rights.

The Committee welcomed the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, which launched the current peace process and which was based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The historic compromise of 1993, which was based on mutual recognition by the two parties and the establishment of a negotiating process aimed at implementing those two Security Council resolutions — this compromise in which the Palestinians participated as full and equal partners — was an important historic milestone. The agreements concluded since, including the Wye River Memorandum and the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, signalled that, despite all sorts of obstacles, a diplomatic solution that takes into account the rights and needs of both sides was indeed possible. The Committee was encouraged by some of the steps taken between 1994 and 1998 to implement those agreements.

Among the concrete accomplishments of the past year, I will note the partial release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a southern safe-passage route between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the further redeployment of Israeli troops from some areas of the West Bank, the resumption of the interim and permanent status talks, and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements on the implementation of economic issues and on the construction work on the port of Gaza. In spite of the lack of tangible results, the Committee also welcomed the Camp David Peace Summit of last July, and we were encouraged by the commitment of the two parties to continue their efforts to conclude an agreement on all the permanent-status issues.

Notwithstanding the difficulties that the peace negotiations had encountered, and despite the impasse that was created at the end of July by the discussions on Jerusalem, we all had nourished hopes that progress would still be possible and that the parties were about to get down to further discussions of the sensitive permanent-status issues.

Regrettably, our expectations were dashed on 28 September last. The Committee members, along with the rest of the international community, were greatly dismayed by the violent confrontations between the Israel Defence Forces and police and Palestinian civilians at the holy site of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the Holy City, the city of peace — Jerusalem — after the visit to that site of the Israeli opposition leader, Mr. Sharon, accompanied by a group of Likud Knesset members and hundreds of Israeli security personnel and police.

The confrontations provoked by that visit flared up all across the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. As a result almost 280 people died, most them Palestinians, and many thousands were injured. The Israeli Defence Forces employed excessive and indiscriminate force against Palestinian protesters. The Committee was particularly shocked by the deaths of innocent Palestinian children. At its meeting on 10 October, the Committee voiced its position with regard to these tragic events and adopted a statement on the matter.

Our Committee strongly believes that the events of the past several weeks were a direct result of the policies and practices of the occupation and the failure of Israel to live up to its obligations under the Geneva Convention and to respect the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. The events can also be attributed to the slow pace of progress and real achievements in the negotiations on critical permanent-status issues. It is therefore incumbent on the parties, the co-sponsors of the peace process and other international actors to redress this situation — a situation which threatens to allow disillusionment, despair and frustration to set in and demolish the fragile achievements made in that process.

That fear is precisely the reason why our Committee fervently hoped that implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh agreements of last September would put an end to the violence and enable the setting up of a fact-finding committee on the basis of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) in order to restore peace so that the parties can once again return to the negotiating table. We welcomed the determined efforts to revive the peace process made by Presidents Bill Clinton of the United States and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, as well as by His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan, Mr. Javier Solana of the European Union and our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan.

As the Assembly will no doubt recall, both the Security Council and the General Assembly, at its

resumed tenth emergency special session, considered the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and recommended certain measures in that regard. It was particularly important that the Secretary-General briefed the Assembly on his mission to the region and on his extremely useful role as facilitator to bring the parties together.

The experience of the past several months has clearly shown that members of the European Union, Arab States and others of good will can likewise each make their contribution to the efforts to restart peace negotiations.

Our Committee has always maintained that the United Nations should continue to exercise its primary and permanent responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with the relevant resolutions of the Organization and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. That constructive and complementary role of the United Nations and its involvement in the peace process are today more crucial and needed than ever.

The Committee believes that the Organization should remain the guardian of international legitimacy and play a key role in mobilizing international assistance for development, given the importance of such assistance to the peace process. The international community should also stand ready to contribute generously, as permanent-status issues — which include Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and borders — are complex and multidimensional questions that may require outside assistance in order to overcome various obstacles.

In addition to the difficulties the parties have run into in recent months — especially those related to the status and future of the Holy City of Jerusalem — other elements have arisen to complicate the negotiations, among which is the continuing construction of Israeli settlements in and around Jerusalem that is changing the demographic character of the city in an attempt influence the eventual outcome of the talks on the issue.

While acknowledging the need to make progress in the peace negotiations, we should not lose sight of the highly disturbing situation on the ground. Our Committee has observed very closely and with growing alarm all the Israeli settlement activities and the construction of roads throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The establishment of those settlements remains a principal factor adding to the tension between the parties and hindering the peace process. We are today troubled by the fact that, despite ongoing negotiations, settlement activity is still being pursued at the same pace as in previous years.

The Committee reaffirms in the strongest possible terms that the confiscation of Palestinian land, the demolition of houses and other Palestinian property and the construction of settlements and other illegal building on Palestinian land constitute a serious violation of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. Such illegal acts clearly run contrary to the bilateral agreements reached to date and should never predetermine the outcome of final negotiations.

The Committee is also increasingly concerned by the economic hardship suffered by the Palestinian people as a result of Israeli actions. The occupying Power continues to impose arbitrary closures as a means of collective punishment, with severe consequences for Palestinian families. The protracted siege of Palestinian population centres in recent weeks has resulted in a dramatic deterioration of Palestinians' already-precarious living conditions. The losses to the Palestinian economy in terms of its gross domestic product as a result of banning access to Israeli territory in the first month of violence have recently been estimated by the World Bank to be about $210 million. The Bank also stated that this figure could rise to as much as $630 million if the closure continues until the end of the year. Palestinian sources quote much higher figures.

More than 120,000 Palestinians have lost their jobs in Israel. They and their families must now depend on emergency assistance from the World Food Programme, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other agencies and donors. The Palestinian Authority is no longer able to meet its payroll because of Israel's unilateral decision to withhold funds it should be transferring to the Authority under concluded agreements, such as value-added taxes and customs revenues. Such policies can only result in a further exacerbation of the feelings of frustration and despair of the Palestinian people and

cannot but compound and render even more intractable a situation that is already critical.

Over the decades the international community has demonstrated its readiness to support the struggle of the Palestinian people and their quest for self-determination and independence. Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, and eminent personalities have worked untiringly throughout the world to help the Palestinian people make this noble objective a reality.

Today, at a time when Israeli-Palestinian relations are challenged by many trials and tribulations on the ground, it is absolutely essential that all actors support the peace process and do everything in their power to help the parties through this most difficult phase.

For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People remains firmly committed to making an effective, construction and concrete contribution to the achievement of this objective through its own programme of work. Since the inception of the Madrid process nine years ago, in 1991, our Committee has endeavoured, through our various mandated activities, to lend support to this peace initiative and promote it worldwide.

The Committee has also worked to promote the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and international legitimacy, in the framework of a settlement that would ensure the full exercise of all of the rights of the Palestinian people within the context of their legitimate right to self-determination and independence as a sovereign state.

As Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to the four draft resolutions that have been circulated under this item.

Let me first inform the Assembly that Brunei Darussalam, Mali and Oman, as well as other countries, have joined the list of sponsors. We will update that list in due course.

The first three drafts relate, respectively, to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Division for Palestinian Rights; and the Department for Public Information. The drafts reaffirm the important mandates have always been entrusted to these entities.

The draft resolutions focus on promoting the Committee's endeavours in support of the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, in the framework of an equitable solution to the Middle East crisis.

As in the past, the Committee intends to make maximal use of the resources available to it and to concentrate on those activities that have been most effective in the implementation of its mandate. Provision has been made for funding the activities outlined in the three drafts in the programme budget for the 2000-2001 biennium.

The fourth draft, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", which reflects the position of the General Assembly with regard to the key elements of a settlement, was formulated in the light of the developments of the past year.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced give a general outline of the positions, mandates and programmes that are of special importance, particularly at the present stage of the peace process.

I would like to call on the General Assembly to express its full support for these projects in the interests of the peace process, of the Palestinian people and of peace for all in the region.

I should like also to thank the President for his support of the activities of the Committee and for attaching particular importance to the question of a peaceful settlement of the question of the Middle East.

The President: I give the floor to Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee.

In the course of the past year, the Committee continued to carry out the mandate given to it by the General Assembly. The present report covers the developments concerning the question of Palestine, the peace process and the activities of the Committee from

the time of last year's report through 10 October of this year.

The introduction to the report is contained in chapter I and outlines the Committee's objectives and its perspective on the events which have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work in the year under review.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the year. The chapter takes note of a number of encouraging steps taken in implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. In particular, it refers to the further redeployment of Israeli troops from parts of the West Bank, the agreement on the release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a southern safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the resumption of the negotiations on permanent status issues.

The Committee welcomes the signing, on 7 June 2000, of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement on the implementation of economic issues, as well as the agreement concerning the Gaza seaport, signed on 20 September 2000. The Committee also takes note of the official statement made by the Palestinian Central Council at the conclusion of its session in Gaza, on 9 and 10 September 2000. The chapter reviews the developments on the ground since 28 September 2000 and international efforts to end the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. It makes reference to the action taken by the Security Council in that regard and the adoption by the Council of resolution 1322 (2000).

Also in this chapter, the Committee reviews in some detail the situation on the ground, in particular with regard to Israel's settlement activity, its policy on residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites, the situation with respect to Palestinian prisoners, the state of the Palestinian economy, water resources available to the Palestinians, action by the donor community and the United Nations system, and the activities and operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action aimed at promoting Palestinian rights in the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies. This includes a reference to communications addressed to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General. It contains reference to the consideration by the Security Council in October of the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question". This section also includes information on the participation by the Committee Chairman in various international forums.

Section B contains an account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 54/39 and 54/40. It contains information on the dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union. This section also carries a brief account of the various international meetings organized in the course of the year, namely, the United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Hanoi on 1 to 3 March 2000; the International Conference on Palestine Refugees held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris on 26 and 27 April 2000; the United Nations NGO Meeting on Palestine Refugees, also held at UNESCO headquarters on 28 April 2000; the United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East, held in Athens on 23 and 24 May 2000; and the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, held in Cairo on 20 and 21 June 2000.

It further reviews the Committee's cooperation with non-governmental organizations; the publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the project on the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine; the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Section C reflects the action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/22 of 10 November 1999 on the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Chapter VI contains information on the action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 54/41 of 1 December 1999.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter, the Committee expresses its readiness to continue to support the peacemaking efforts of the Israelis and Palestinians, assisted by the sponsors, until peace prevails and the question of Palestine is settled on the basis of justice and international legitimacy.

The Committee welcomes a number of steps made in implementation of earlier Israeli-Palestinian agreements, including the partial release of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the further redeployment of Israeli troops from areas of the West Bank and the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian agreements on economic issues and on the Gaza seaport. It also notes that the important September 2000 meetings held on the sidelines of the Millennium Summit created expectations of a breakthrough in the peace process.

The Committee emphasizes that, more than 50 years after the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, the Palestinian people is yet to see the establishment of its own independent and sovereign State. The Committee reiterates its full support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State, and recalls the broad international support for Palestinian statehood.

The Committee refers to the policies and practices of Israel on the ground, including the establishment of settlements. It stresses the need to find a solution to the question of Jerusalem and to the problem of Palestine refugees. The Committee reiterates its position that the United Nations should continue to exercise its permanent responsibility towards all the aspects of the question of Palestine until it is resolved in a satisfactory manner, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and in accordance with international legitimacy, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized. It expresses the view that the important work carried out by UNRWA should be continued. The Committee also supports the view that the reactivation of the work of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, and the use of the records of the Commission related to land ownership in Palestine should be considered.

The Committee states that it will continue to review and assess its programme of activities with a view to making it more focused and responsive to developments in the peace process and on the ground.

The Committee indicates its intention to continue to promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority and draws the attention of the international community to the urgency of providing varied assistance to many other Palestinian municipalities throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Committee recognizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of the Committee's objectives and requests it to continue its programme of publications and other informational activities, including the updating of UNISPAL and the completion of work on its collection of documents hitherto unavailable in machine-readable form.

The Committee notes that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information remains an important and useful tool in informing the media and public opinion on issues relating to the question of Palestine. The Committee also considers that the programme should be continued with the necessary flexibility, as required by developments affecting the question of Palestine.

Finally, in an effort to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls on all States to join in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

I trust that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in facilitating its deliberations on this important issue.

Mr. Kaddoumi (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Holkeri on his election as President of this session of the General

Assembly. I can only commend the positions of his friendly country, Finland. We are confident that his ability and wisdom will bring success to our session. We highly appreciate the efforts made by his predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, who struggled in this same General Assembly for the achievement of Namibia's independence. I would also like to express our appreciation and thanks to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for all the efforts he has deployed for the realization of the objectives of the Organization.

We have considered the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and we would like to thank the Committee and its Chairman, Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka, for all their efforts to promote the rights of the Palestinian people.

Once again today, we are considering the question of Palestine, which has remained on the agenda of the General Assembly for over half a century. The United Nations is the organization that took the decision on the partition of Palestine, thereby creating the most difficult political and security problem in the Middle East. Since the adoption of that resolution, the region has witnessed many conflicts and wars that have, regrettably, caused the dispersion of millions of Palestinians, the original inhabitants of the country.

At a time when we were calling for an end to the British mandate and for the establishment of a democratic State in Palestine, we accepted coexistence with the Jewish foreigners who had systematically immigrated to Palestine before the Second World War. We had hoped that this small piece of sacred land, respected and glorified by the three divine religions, would not be partitioned.

We had hoped to avoid the eruption of the conflicts that were destined to become a permanent concern to mankind. However, the ambitions of the Zionist movement, the conspiracy of old colonialism and the interests of certain large States caused the continuation of wars and conflicts between the Arabs and Israel. To make things worse, the Soviet Union opened its doors to Jewish immigration to Israel in the late 1980s.

Because of that Jewish immigration, the Middle East region witnessed five wars. In the wake of each of these five wars, the United States took a certain political initiative. This continued until 1991, when former United States President George Bush, following the second Gulf War, took a new political initiative, one that was accepted by the parties concerned. Public opinion believed that this augured a new era in which security and stability would be established in the Middle East region. This initiative was taken on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and on the principle of land for peace, with a view to guaranteeing the security of the States of the region and the legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people, on the basis of which the Madrid Peace Conference was held in October 1991.

Great hopes were pinned on negotiations in Washington between the Arabs and Israel, but two years passed without any tangible progress on the different issues due to the intransigence of former Israeli Prime Minister Shamir, who declared that he intended to spend 10 years in futile negotiations that would yield no results. He was followed by Mr. Yitzhak Rabin and the Oslo Declaration of Principles in 1993, with a view to implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Only at this point was there some progress towards a political settlement, thanks to the flexibility shown by the Palestinian side and the response of Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, who was assassinated by an Israeli fanatic in 1995. The assassination of Mr. Rabin was a true shock to international public opinion.

Peres came to power then Netanyahu, who thwarted any hopes of a settlement. Netanyahu started with his extreme racist practices and declarations that threatened more dangers. He repeated at times that the Oslo Accords implied further dangers to Israeli security and that there was still a need for other agreements that would bring peace and security to Israeli society. He insisted, in extreme intransigence, on renegotiating all the agreements signed by previous officials. He wasted months and even years in futile meetings at the highest level, under the sponsorship of President Clinton and his Secretary of State, Mrs. Madeleine Albright. In spite of the futility of these negotiations, the Palestinian side responded to the appeals of international public opinion to continue the negotiations to avoid their failure and to negate all the pretexts made by Netanyahu to hinder the negotiations.

The process of political settlement in the Netanyahu era was struck with paralysis. Political instability was created by the Israelis in Jerusalem in

September 1996, when they started digging a tunnel under Al-Haram Al-Sharif, leading to bloody confrontations in which dozens of martyrs fell. The Security Council condemned Israeli actions in this regard by adopting resolution 1073 (1996).

The Palestinian side responded to the request for security agreements between the Palestinians and Israelis with United States participation. The Palestinians were also called to meet with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Tony Blair, in London in December 1997, but Mr. Netanyahu refused to participate. Then President Clinton invited President Arafat and Mr. Netanyahu to a meeting in January 1998. At that time Mr. Netanyahu came to Washington armed with resolutions that had been adopted by the Israeli Government on 15 January 1998. These resolutions stipulated vital Israeli national interests that, from the Israeli point of view, could not be renounced in either an interim or a permanent agreement.

Those vital Israeli interests are the following. First, the eastern security zone along the Jordan River. This zone is 80 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide. Secondly, the western security areas, four to six kilometres wide. Thirdly, all the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 185 settlements, the routes connecting these settlements and all the infrastructure, including electricity, water and transportation. Fourthly, the sacred Jewish sites, including greater Jerusalem, and all the roads and highways linking them. As a result, nothing was left for the Palestinians.

After repeated attempts, President Clinton was able to convince the two parties, the Palestinians and the Israelis, to attend a summit meeting at the Wye Plantation. At this meeting Israel was to announce its willingness to redeploy its army within only 13 per cent of the Palestinian territories. Nonetheless, Mr. Netanyahu only agreed to implement that agreement partially, then he declared that general elections would be held in Israel within seven months.

In June 1999 Netanhayu was succeeded by Mr. Barak, who has now declared once again that general elections would be held. This is a game of continual elections.

President Clinton wrote to President Arafat on 26 April 1999:

(spoke in English)

> "I know that your people have faced great difficulties in the past several years. Clearly the Oslo process has not made the kind of progress we would have hoped to see. Much time has been wasted and many opportunities have been lost. ... The Palestinians have implemented many of their commitments for the second phase, and I appreciate your efforts, particularly in the security area where Palestinians are engaged in a serious effort to fight terror. ... We will continue to work actively for implementation by Israel."

So Israel did not implement its commitments; this is certified by the President of the United States.

In his letter he continued:

> "In this context, and in the spirit of my remarks in Gaza, we support the aspirations of the Palestinian people to determine their own future on their own land. As I said in Gaza, I believe Palestinians should live free today, tomorrow and forever. ...
>
> "The United States further believes that the Oslo process was never intended to be open-ended."

It was decided that it would be five years. Seven years have already passed.

(spoke in Arabic)

Mr. Netanyahu was followed by Mr. Barak in June 1999. Mr. Barak is well known for his hatred of the Arabs and for having committed crimes against the Palestinian leadership. He came to power with five no's, which are not very different from those of Mr. Netanyahu. No to the return of the Palestinian refugees. No to a divided Jerusalem; under Israeli authority, a unified Jerusalem, will be the eternal capital of the Jewish people. No withdrawal to the borders of 4 June 1967. No foreign armies west of the Jordan River. No dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

On a day in May 1999 the scheduled period for negotiations came to an end and the Palestinian Authority was supposed to declare the establishment of a Palestinian independent State on Palestinian territories. But the United States and friendly European countries advised postponing this declaration and extending the negotiations for a sixth year. The

Palestinian Authority responded positively, and negotiations continued for many months without any progress. What is worse is that Mr. Barak ordered the Israeli army to launch a wanton attack against brotherly Lebanon in March 2000. This led to an escalation of tensions in the region and paralysed the peace process for a long time.

After continued American efforts, political negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis were resumed and a tripartite summit was held at Camp David in an attempt to save the peace process as the end of President Clinton's tenure approached. These negotiations lasted for two weeks, but they failed because Israel insisted on total sovereignty over Jerusalem, including over Christian and Islamic sacred sites. Israel claimed that the Al-Aqsa Mosque was built on the ruins of the Temple Mount which was destroyed 2,000 years ago by the Roman emperor Titus.

The Israeli authorities did this knowing that a great archaeologist at the University of Tel Aviv said that after 70 years of extensive digging in Israel, scientists had concluded that there was absolutely no evidence for this claim and that the stories told by the Jewish forefathers were only myths. The archaeologist went on to say that the unified kingdom of David and Solomon, which is described in the Torah as a great State of the region, was at best a small tribal kingdom.

After instability in 1929 that concerned the Western Wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif — the Wailing Wall — the British mandate Government established the Shaw Commission of Enquiry. It worked for two years and submitted its recommendations to the Privy Council, which issued a decree on 19 May 1931. This decree declared that the Muslims and none other have absolute ownership of the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall.

(spoke in English)

I should like to quote from the Privy Council Palestine (Western or Wailing Wall) Order, issued on 19 May 1931:

> "To Moslems belong the sole ownership of, and the sole proprietary right to, the Western Wall, seeing that it forms an integral part of the Haram-esh-Sherif area, which is a Waqf property.
>
> "To the Moslems there also belongs the ownership of the pavement in front of the Wall and of the adjacent so-called Moghrabi (Moroccan) quarter opposite the Wall, inasmuch as the last-mentioned property was made Waqf under Moslem Sharia law, it being dedicated to charitable purposes.
>
> "Such appurtenances of worship and/or such other objects as the Jews may be entitled to place near the Wall either in conformity with the provisions of this present verdict or by agreement come to between the parties, shall under no circumstances be considered as, or have the effect of, establishing them any sort of propriety right to the Wall or to the adjacent pavement. (*schedule I, section A*)
>
> "The Jews shall have free access to the Western Wall". (*ibid., section B*)

Again, this comes from the Privy Council Order and means that the Wall is for the Muslims.

(spoke in Arabic)

As is known, the European Union has repeatedly informed Israel that it rejects its claims that unified Jerusalem is the eternal capital of Israel. This was conveyed in a letter to Mr. Sharon from Mr. Fischer in the month of March.

In addition, during the Camp David summit Mr. Barak requested that 10 per cent of Palestinian territory be annexed to Israel. He also insisted that most Israeli settlements remain under Israeli authority and called for the establishment of monitoring stations on Palestinian territory and military bases on the western bank of the River Jordan. He also called for crossing points between Palestine and Israel to remain under Israel's authority, although he knows full well that Security Council resolution 242 (1967) requires Israel's full withdrawal from all territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem. Moreover, resolution 465 (1980), which was adopted unanimously, requires Israel to dismantle all its settlements, while resolution 478 (1980) found null and void Israeli laws aimed at altering the status or character of Jerusalem.

That raises the question of whether Israel's membership in the United Nations is legitimate as long as it repeatedly rejects or fails to respect the resolutions of the Security Council and violates the principles of the Organization and Article 25 of the Charter. It also raises the question of Iraq, a country under siege because of the implementation of Security Council resolutions. Iraq suffers under sanctions, while Israel

receives support and is protected by a veto. This is indeed a double standard. Although Israel has agreed to the establishment of an Arab-Palestinian State, it wants that State to exist without rights or sovereignty. Israel knows full well that it committed itself to General Assembly resolution 181 (II) when it was admitted as a Member State of the United Nations. That resolution called for the establishment of two States, one Arab-Palestinian and the other Jewish.

The failure of the Camp David summit led to an escalation of tension in occupied Palestinian territories, particularly after Mr. Sharon's violation of the sanctity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif on 28 September 2000 while under the protection of 3,000 Israeli police and army officers. On Friday, 29 September, Israeli police and army troops broke into Al-Quds Al-Sharif and fired at worshipers, killing seven and injuring dozens, thereby leading to the Palestinian intifada that erupted in protest of the criminal actions of Israel, a country that claims to be a democracy.

It is clear that those criminal acts had been planned by Mr. Barak to provoke the Palestinian people. Israel's military Chief of Staff, Mr. Shaul Mofaz, had declared many months before that the second half of the year would see very bloody events in which the Israeli army would employ heavy weapons — including tanks and helicopter gunships — to prevent Palestinians from protesting events on their own territory. Those troops arbitrarily shot at unarmed Palestinian citizens in order to kill them. Israeli tanks besieged Palestinian towns, sealed off their entrances and shot at countless demonstrators. That led to the killing of more than 300 martyrs and injuries to thousands, many of them left permanently maimed.

Israel also put in place many harsh measures, including the imposition of an economic and military blockade against the Palestinian people. It also prohibited the movement of persons between towns and stopped the delivery of food and medical provisions. Furthermore, Israeli settlers confiscated Palestinian olive harvests and uprooted 40,000 olive trees. Electricity and water supplies were cut; oil imports were halted; and the payment of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority was suspended.

All this has led to high unemployment. Our economic losses have reached $900 million due to Israel's actions and the deterioration of the security situation. On 1 November 2000, Amira Hass said in *Ha'aretz* that the new intifada is only the latest attempt by Palestinians to hold up a mirror before Israelis to make them see their racism, arbitrariness and brutality. It shows that Palestinians will not accept coexistence without equality, as the Jews had thought. The article asks if it is normal to close for over a month 34 schools attended by thousands of Palestinian students, saying that those children are cooped up in their already crowded houses while the children of their Jewish neighbours play in the street among and with soldiers.

Hasty contacts were made between Presidents Mohamed Hosni Mubarak and Bill Clinton to stop Israel's acts of aggression and to bring about the withdrawal of Israeli forces besieging Palestinian towns. The result was the holding of the Sharm El-Sheikh summit on 16 October. That meeting was attended by the Secretary-General, His Majesty King Abdullah II and, on behalf of the European Union, Mr. Javier Solana.

An agreement was reached at Sharm El-Sheikh to establish a committee of inquiry. On 7 October, the Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000), and the General Assembly met in emergency special session on 20 October to adopt a resolution calling for the provision of adequate protection for Palestinians under occupation and condemning Israel's aggression and excessive violence against Palestinian civilians.

The United Nations has the full and permanent responsibility to provide adequate protection for the Palestinian people. In that context, we believe that a meeting of the parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should be called to establish a mechanism to provide that protection. Such an arrangement should have both the responsibility and the authority to protect Palestinians. That protection should not take the form of merely sending observers or a small international presence such as the one previously deployed in Al-Khalil. It is also the Security Council's responsibility to authorize the Secretary-General to put together such a force.

November 29 coincides with the fifty-second anniversary of the adoption of resolution 181 (II), which partitioned Palestine into two states — one Arab Palestinian and one Jewish — and used it as a condition for the acceptance of either entity in the membership of the United Nations. The General Assembly accepted the membership of Israel, which has not fulfilled that condition. The Palestinian people

are now asking for membership, as the Palestinian National Council has accepted resolution 181 (II).

We deeply appreciate the position of the European Union, reaffirmed on 15 November 2000, on the need to establish a viable, democratic and peaceful Palestinian state. This would represent the best guarantee for the security of Israel, enabling it to live like all of the other States in the region — protecting itself while participating in efforts towards peace, security and stability.

This failure on the part of the Israelis is the natural result of political rivalry among Israeli political parties. That rivalry cost Yitzhak Rabin his life and produced a psychological state of mind in Israeli society that causes it to be overly concerned about security, despite the fact that a political settlement would provide Israel, and all the Arab parties, with the elements of peace and security.

Many Arab countries had begun to normalize their relations with Israel following the signing of the Oslo agreements and peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. The Palestinians have proved their good intentions and their desire to establish peace and peaceful coexistence with the Israelis. They have shown the flexibility that was demanded by the West and adopted political positions that were received with acceptance by European countries and the United States, in contradiction to the intransigence of the Israeli positions.

French President Jacques Chirac and the United Kingdom Prime Minister visited our territories and expressed their satisfaction with the peace process.

President Clinton wrote to President Arafat, saying:

(spoke in English)

> "As May 4 approaches, I also understand that you face enormous pressures and challenges in trying to realize your destiny and aspirations and keep hopes for peace alive. In your effort to deal with these challenges, I am asking that you continue to rely on the peace process as a way to fulfil the aspirations of your people. Indeed, negotiations are the only realistic way to fulfil those aspirations. In this context, and in the spirit of my remarks in Gaza, I believe the Palestinians should live free, today, tomorrow and forever."

(spoke in Arabic)

Despite all of these indications of the success of the peace process, which was fraught with prevarication and lack of commitment on the part of the Israelis, the Palestinian people continued to hope for a peaceful solution. But Zionist extremists, with their racist ideas and hatred for the Arabs, called us snakes, starting with Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, the President of the Shas Party, and Mr. Barak, who called us crocodiles. Despite all this, we ignored all name-calling, cleansing our hearts of hatred and anger in order to establish peace on the basis of justice and equality in the Middle East.

We wonder what the reason is for the vicious attack by the Israeli army against the Palestinian people and its besieging of our towns. If the Israeli authorities think they can force us to make any more concessions or to take positions that are not humanitarian, they are wrong. It is impossible for us to act in such a way, despite the loss of scores of martyrs who were defending their holy sites, national rights and human rights.

But daily Israeli practices prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Israel is a racist State. Israeli police forces and its army fired on Israeli Arabs, killing 14 and wounding dozens. If those demonstrators had been Jews, not a single bullet would have been fired against them. On the contrary, they would have been protected.

Things did not stop there. Israel intensified the process of the establishment of settlements on Palestinian territories, whose number has reached 185 and in which 270,000 Jewish immigrants live. Successive Israeli Governments provided them with weapons with a view to enabling them to terrorize and attack the inhabitants of peaceful Palestinian villages, in order to continue their occupation of our territories.

Mr. Barak, the apprentice of Mr. Rabin, forgot that his mentor failed to abort the first intifada. He had called for breaking the bones of all Palestinians and wished for the sea to swallow struggling Gaza. But in the end, he chose, with the help of Mr. Peres, a political solution leading to the Oslo agreement. Why will he not take heed of the lessons of history instead of prevaricating and wheeling and dealing in his positions, through which he is attempting to prove to Israeli society and to Zionist extremists that he wants

only to protect them and to maintain the settlements? Instead, Barak responds to his Israeli critics by saying:

> "Send those critics and those who complain to Ramallah and Gaza for a few days. Then they will realize that the party that pays the highest price in these confrontations is the Palestinian party."

We ask the Assembly here and now to dispatch an international fact-finding committee to investigate firsthand these criminal Israeli actions, so that a decision can be taken immediately to dispatch international emergency forces to the Palestinian territories to protect the Palestinian people from this war of extinction.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I should like to extend my thanks and gratitude to Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the members of the Committee, for his valuable report and for the statement he has just made, which reflected very clearly the gravity of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the latest developments therein, as Israel continues to violate the most fundamental principles of international humanitarian law.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government and people of the United Arab Emirates reaffirms its continual support for, and solidarity with, the brotherly Palestinian people in their just struggle to bring about their legitimate aspirations to self-determination, like other peoples of the world.

The United Nations has lived with this issue for 52 years. The political, historical and legal roots of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, lie in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947 on the partition of Palestine into two States — one Palestinian and one Israeli — and in subsequent relevant resolutions essentially affirming the rights of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with its capital in Jerusalem, and of refugees to return to their homeland in Palestine, as well as the elimination of all Israeli colonialist settlements. Despite all these international resolutions and the bilateral accords signed by the Palestinians and the Israelis, Israel continues to violate the resolutions of international legitimacy, thus challenging the will of the international community, which has ceaselessly striven to ensure a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East.

The holy Al-Aqsa intifada has entered its third month and Israel continues to perpetrate crimes of genocide and armed aggression, to destroy houses, property and the infrastructure of Palestinian economic and social institutions and to pursue such measures as illegal imprisonment, coercive detention, laying siege, preventing communications between towns and cities and totally isolating the occupied Palestinian territory from the outside world. It is also preventing the delivery of food and necessary medical supplies to the Palestinian people, flouting international humanitarian norms and principles. We therefore urge the international community to provide economic, financial and humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in order to overcome such difficulties.

Anyone who has followed all these tragic incidents and events will clearly perceive the true intention of the Israeli Government to consolidate its occupation of Palestinian territory. The latest international reports have emphasized the fact that Israel continues to build settlements, particularly in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in order to change its demographic, historic and religious character and to establish new faits accomplis of the occupation. It does so despite the many relevant international resolutions, in particular Security Council 1322 (2000) and the most recent resolution adopted at the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which call on Israel, the occupying Power, immediately to cease all its hostile activities against the Palestinian people.

The Israeli Government, however, continues to ignore its legal, political and moral obligations. It persists in promoting its illegal settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, in the most serious violation of international law, United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which guarantees the protection of civilians and their property in times of war.

Mr. Ling (Belarus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The United Arab Emirates has condemned all these illegal Israeli violations, particularly in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which are the direct cause of the

breakdown and stalemate in the peace process. We reaffirm once again the responsibility of the United Nations, the Security Council in particular, for the implementation of its own resolutions on the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with its capital in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. If we are to address the most serious current events in the occupied Palestinian territories, we must stop using double standards and we must take urgent and immediate steps to contain this increasingly inhumane situation by providing necessary international protection for the Palestinian people in all the Arab territories occupied since 1967. Furthermore, we must try Israeli war criminals for the murder of hundreds of Palestinian martyrs and the injury of thousands more, just as we try war criminals elsewhere in the world.

The Security Council has previously adopted resolutions leading to the dispatch of international forces — to East Timor, for instance, and elsewhere. The Council's failure to take similar measures for the protection of the Palestinian people would be a flagrant inconsistency and would highlight the use of double standards by some of its permanent members in dealing with the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

History will record this injustice. Must we understand from this that the Palestinian people, which have contributed to human civilization in all its forms in ancient and modern times, does not belong to the family of nations of this world? If the international community, the Security Council in particular, had stood up to such crimes, the Israeli authorities would have been unable to continue violating the rights of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, we wish to affirm that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East cannot be achieved unless the sponsors of the peace process, especially the United States and the members of the European Union, prevail upon Israel to withdraw fully and unconditionally from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farmlands, and to allow the full return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland and the establishment of the independent State of Palestine, with its capital in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Israel must also eliminate and outlaw its weapons of mass destruction, particularly its nuclear weapons, in the context of the resolutions of international legitimacy and on basis of the principle of land for peace and all the Palestinian-Israeli accords, which Israel has deliberately violated.

This region, which is very important strategically and economically to the international community, will continue to experience deterioration and instability, which will in turn affect international and regional peace and security.

Mr. Wang Yingfan (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The question of the Middle East has been one of the world's longest-standing hot-spot issues. Despite some progress in the Middle East peace process, the peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel have experienced many twists and turns and millions of Palestinian refugees, who have suffered so much for so long under the endless scourge of war and violence, remain displaced and unable to return to their homeland.

Although the Palestinians have achieved self-government in parts of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank of the River Jordan, they still face great difficulties in terms of economic development and people's livelihood. Their suffering has focused the attention of the international community and generated widespread sympathy. More recently, the violence rekindled between Israel and Palestine at the end of last September has caused enormous losses of Palestinian lives and property.

This new round of Israeli-Palestinian conflict has seriously disrupted the Middle East peace process, plunging the whole region into volatility and instability. The Chinese Government is deeply concerned over this. We oppose the use of force by the Israeli authorities against innocent civilians and therefore have voted in favour of relevant resolutions concerning the latest developments in the Middle East in the Security Council, in the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council and in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. The Chinese Red Cross Society has already provided emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, and civil society in China has also extended its support and conveyed sympathy to Palestinian people in various forms.

The facts have fully demonstrated that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue. Without a real solution to the Palestinian

question there is no way to root out violence in the Middle East. Violence will only serve to deepen mutual hatred, while negotiation and dialogue will bring hope and peace. Achieving a political resolution of the Palestinian question through negotiation and dialogue is not only in the fundamental interest of the people of all countries in the Middle East, but is also conducive to peace and stability in the region and in the world at large. We believe that the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to statehood, should be restored, and the international community has the obligation and the responsibility to render the necessary help to the Palestinians in this regard.

I wish to reiterate that China supports the Middle East peace process and has always maintained that Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) on the Middle East, as well as the principle of land for peace, constitute the basis for Middle East peace negotiations. Both the Arab side and the Israeli side should try to resolve their differences through earnest and practical negotiations and move the peace process forward on the basis of the implementation of the existing agreements between them. We firmly support the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and oppose Israel's unjustifiable resort to force or threat of the use of force and the practice of bullying the weaker and smaller.

For the time being, it is of the utmost importance to stop the violence between Palestine and Israel. In this regard, we support all positive efforts made by concerned countries and Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Chinese Government will continue to make its contribution to the cessation of the violence and the promotion of the peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. Mwakawago (United Republic of Tanzania): In our statement on this agenda item at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, last year, my delegation expressed its hope that with the advent of the new millennium, the question of Palestine would take a turn for the better. This optimism was based on the promising progress that had been made in the peace process, aimed at finding a lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

As we speak today, we deeply regret that the situation in the Palestinian territories has taken a tragic turn for the worse. Not only has the peace process ground to a halt, but the current situation is even threatening to reverse the achievements of the last few years. It is not far-fetched to assume that in a volatile region this could endanger international peace and security.

Like others who have spoken before us, we deeply deplore the recent tragic events in that area resulting in the deaths of many and injuries to thousands of innocent people. We offer our sincere condolences to the bereaved families. My delegation strongly deplores the provocative acts that ignited the unfortunate events. We also deplore the use of excessive and disproportionate force by the Israeli army. There can be no justification for the use of tanks, helicopter gunships and missiles against stone-throwing protesters. Surely there must be other ways of restraining such demonstrators.

Israel's use of such deadly military force against Palestinian civilians is inexcusable and can only lead to more violence. Furthermore, we strongly oppose the collective punishment meted out against the Palestinian civilian population by the Israeli authorities. Such measures have a tendency to fuel anger and resentment and thus exacerbate the situation. We appeal for wiser counsel to prevail. There must be restraint all around, for we believe that there is no military solution to the conflict. Negotiations are the only way out. However, these have to take place on the basis of equity, justice and fairness. In this regard, my delegation would like to express its deep appreciation for the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General and others to encourage a resolution of the Middle East conflict through peaceful means.

A comprehensive settlement of the present conflict can be achieved only by granting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to independence and to their own independent State. In the context of the present circumstances, we fully support the expeditious implementation of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), which, among other things, calls for the establishment of an international inquiry into the tragic events in the region with the aim of preventing their repetition. In the same vein, we support the call for the deployment of a United Nations observer force in the area. We believe that such measures would go a long way towards easing the situation and ensuring the safety and lives of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, my delegation calls for an immediate cessation of violence and calls on both parties — Palestine and Israel — to move towards the resumption of peaceful negotiations as soon as possible. We firmly believe that peaceful negotiation is the only effective means of ensuring a lasting solution to the conflict and thus guaranteeing lasting peace, security and stability in the region. Peace should be given a chance. It is imperative to realize that the preponderance of force will not deliver peace or ensure a conducive climate for negotiations.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): South Africa has been a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People since 1977. Upon becoming a member we, stated to the Committee,

> "The struggles and sacrifices of our people against apartheid could not but inspire us to support the fight of the Palestinian people for self-determination and the establishment of an independent State."

We are convinced that the Committee, under the able leadership of Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, functioning as an organ established by the Assembly to deal with the question of Palestine, continues to have an important role during this crucial period.

In collaboration with the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, the Committee serves to increase international awareness of the question of Palestine.

At this critical juncture for the Palestinian people, the continued support of the United Nations and its organizations and agencies cannot be underestimated.

South Africa supports the struggle of the Palestinian people. We firmly believe that the achievement of their inalienable rights to self-determination and independence is pivotal for the achievement of a sustained and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

This morning, the United Nations commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Allow me to quote from the message of President Thabo Mbeki, Chairman the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM):

> "It is inexcusable that, more than 50 years after the United Nations affirmed the right of Palestinians to sovereign statehood and more than 30 years after the Security Council, in a binding decision, called on Israel to withdraw from all the Arab territories that it had occupied in the war of June 1967, the suffering and humiliation of foreign military occupation still continue." *(A/AC.183/PV.255)*

Meeting at the Millennium Assembly, the NAM ministers reiterated that a just and comprehensive peace can be achieved only by upholding international legitimacy and relevant United Nations resolutions. They resolved to actively strive towards the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, they reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We welcome the report of the Committee, contained in document A/55/35, submitted to this session of the Assembly. One of the important functions of the Committee is to provide a forum for discussion for Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. South Africa had the opportunity to participate as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement at the important international conferences held under the auspices of the Committee this year.

The recent United Nations international conference in Paris drew attention to the desperate plight of Palestinian refugees as a result of displacement. The Non-Aligned Movement has repeatedly called for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions related to Palestinian refugees. We emphasize that resolution 194 (III) of 1948 must constitute the basis for a just resolution of the refugee question.

The United Nations International Meeting in Support of a Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Establishment of Peace in the Middle East was held in Athens this year. The Non-Aligned Movement Chair reiterated the Movement's position on the need for Member States to respect the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their 1977 Additional Protocols. In this regard, NAM has called on Israel to halt all settlement-related activity and other illegal activities in the occupied territories and to cease actions which exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

These acts constitute an illegal attempt to change the physical character, legal status and demographic composition of the occupied territories, in direct violation of the agreements reached between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel and in direct violation of international law.

We firmly believe that peaceful negotiation is the only means of ensuring lasting peace, security and stability in the region. We welcome the important role of the Secretary-General in the efforts for a peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine, the nucleus of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Endorsing the draft resolutions that are before the Assembly would send a clear message that, until a definitive solution is reached for the Palestinian people, the United Nations will remain fully engaged on the question of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Sindi (Yemen) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Following the adoption of resolution 181 (II) (1947), which provides for the partition of Palestine into two States, one a Palestinian Islamic and Christian State and the other a Jewish State, only the State of Israel was established, while the people of Palestine were, and still are, displaced from their homeland. Since that day, particularly since the adoption of resolution 32/40 B, the representatives of the international community have expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people through the International Day of Solidarity.

During its forty-third session, the Assembly recognized the proclamation of the State of Palestine and affirmed the need of the Palestinian people to exercise its sovereignty over the territory occupied since 1967. We believed that this would end the violence, killing and occupation and would bring about a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Regrettably, the occupation continued, the aggressive practices doubled and the displacement continued until the call came for the holding of the Madrid Conference, followed by the Oslo Accords. We thought this would mark the beginning of the negotiations on the peace process in the Middle East under the sponsorship of the United States and the Russian Federation.

The peoples of the area welcomed these developments because of their desire to bring about stability and to live in peace.

All these endeavours, including the personal role assumed by President Clinton, starting with the Wye River summit and continuing at Camp David and Washington and the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, which was held under the sponsorship of President Hosni Mubarak, King Abdullah, President Clinton and Secretary-General Kofi Annan, have not led to an agreement because of Israel's continual rejection of an agreement. The ongoing violations against the Holy City and its people — which escalated into the Al-Quds Al-Sharif massacre as a result of the provocative visit of Ariel Sharon and the hostile, inflammatory statements of Israeli officials regarding Jerusalem, such as the declaration of the intention to rebuild the Temple on the ruins of the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque — have led to the explosion of a popular uprising rejecting calls for an end to the Arab, Islamic and Christian identity of Palestine.

The Middle East peace process is currently in a serious dilemma because of the military actions of the Israeli occupying Power and its use of all types of weapons. Because of scientific innovations and developments, information technology and television satellite transmission, the world sees, hears and lives the bloody, aggressive acts against and the ongoing killing of everything Palestinian. The killing of the child Mohammed Al-Durra in his father's arms is a case in point.

The aggression has reached its peak. Instead of the occupying Power working to fulfil the calls made by Mrs. Mary Robinson, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to stop violence, the Israeli State continues to incite the Israeli settlers implanted in the heart of the occupied Arab territories to threaten her, to stop her mounted escort for a time and to prevent her from assuming her responsibilities in keeping with her programme, thus impeding the work of this very important international figure. Her recently issued report represents sufficient condemnation of the Israeli occupying force, as she called for the deployment of international observers, for stopping the use of force, for dismantling Israeli settlements and for protecting the Palestinians from settler violence.

Nonetheless, the Israeli occupation force has gone to even greater extremes using internationally prohibited munitions in its brutal attacks against the Palestinian people on the evening of 20 November 2000, in addition to the siege and closing of border

passages, the burning of farms, prevention of workers' freedom of movement and the killing of the elderly, youths, women and children. To date, there have been more than 300 killed and more than 11,000 injured in a period of little more than two months. This is all because the Palestinian people have sought their inalienable natural and historical right to establish their independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, the international community, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, are called upon today, more than ever before, to intervene in an impartial manner to halt the Israeli campaigns against the unarmed Palestinian people, to provide international protection, in accordance with the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to send a fact-finding committee soon and to effect the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces and settlers from the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, the capital of the State of Palestine.

Mr. Buallay (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our hopes were revived when peace agreements between the Palestinian and Israeli parties were signed in 1993 in Washington. We had hoped that the Palestinian people would finally be able to regain their territories usurped by Israel. We had hoped that they would be able to establish their independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital, and that the Middle East region would live in peace and security, which have been absent since the establishment of the so-called State of Israel in 1948.

Since these agreements were signed in 1993, events have once again demonstrated that the Middle East peace process is subject to fluctuations and political developments in the region. It is noteworthy that this is due to a large extent to the repeated changes of Israeli Governments that are responsible for the implementation of those agreements. Every Israeli Government in authority has taken steps backwards, reneging on almost all the commitments of the previous Government. It has become very clear to everyone that successive Israeli Governments either do not want to continue the peace process or want to impose peace through their own high-handed approach and in total disregard of anything that is not Israeli.

It has become clear that the Palestinian people have grown sick and tired of that, and have taken the initiative and started their intifada. The Palestinian people may have an excuse because Israel has adopted a policy of taking and not giving. It hesitates when it comes to withdrawing from the occupied territories, contradicting the peace agreements signed in Washington. It intensifies the establishment of settlements, rejects the return of refugees and is intransigent on the matter of Jerusalem. It has thus brought everything to a standstill.

Additionally, Israel commits provocative acts such as allowing Ariel Sharon to enter Al-Haram Al-Sharif, leading to an angry reaction and an uprising by the Palestinians.

The time has come for the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to adjust its behaviour, to act in accordance with the provisions of the Charter and to cease using its heavy weapons against unarmed Palestinian civilians, particularly children. The question of Palestine will be resolved only pursuant to international law and through the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 242 (1967) and resolution 338 (1973).

Bahrain also believes that the international community should play a fair and just role. It is not fair to treat the two parties on an equal footing at all times. When one party strays and deviates, it should be forced to turn back to appropriate ways.

In these circumstances, for the international community to treat the Israeli and the Palestinian parties on an equal footing would only encourage the Israeli side to continue to deviate from the proper course and would thus harm the rights of the Palestinian people. This would in turn compromise international peace and stability, which ought to be based on justice.

Mr. Sharma (India): As we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the international community today underlines its support for the people of Palestine in their quest for peace and justice and for the realization of their legitimate goals and aspirations. We would like to reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine and to express India's principled and continuing support for their inalienable rights.

India's cherished bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people are based on civilizational links spanning almost every aspect of human endeavour:

cultural, social, religious, economic and political. These links have been strengthened and reinvigorated with the passage of time. Since the time of Mahatma Gandhi, India's support for the Palestinian cause has been strong and unwavering. We have stood and we continue to stand side by side with the people of Palestine in their struggle to achieve their just and legitimate national rights, which is the key to peace and stability in the Middle East. India's advocacy of the Palestinian cause is manifest in our continuous and consistent support for Palestinian issues in the United Nations and other international forums.

India has consistently advocated a peaceful solution to all disputes. The road to peace is often tortuous and strewn with impediments. What is imperative is the commitment of the parties concerned to a peaceful resolution of all outstanding problems. India has closely followed developments concerning the Middle East peace process. The September 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, followed by the 1995 interim agreement on the West Bank and Gaza and by the Hebron accord of January 1997, were courageous initial steps by visionaries aiming to put an end to the saga of feuding and bloodshed and to usher in a new era of peace, stability and coexistence in the region, free of animosity and friction. Subsequently, India has welcomed other interim agreements, including the Wye River Memorandum of 1998 and the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement of 1999, which are milestones in the peace process.

The Camp David summit showed in bold relief the complexities of various issues facing the two sides. India supports continuation of dialogue between them. We hope that the final agreement reached will be mutually beneficial to both sides and will address basic requirements of the situation on a lasting basis.

As a country that has all along had a deep interest and belief in the cause of justice and peace in the Middle East, India has been convinced of the need for dialogue and peaceful negotiations to find a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of all issues between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. We have therefore watched with very deep concern and dismay the recent incidents of violence in Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and other parts of the Palestinian National Authority area and Israel. These incidents have involved deliberate acts of provocation, excessive use of force and violation of basic human rights, including the right to life.

India is encouraged by the understandings reached at the summit meeting held at Sharm el-Sheikh on 17 October. We hope that these will assist in quickly ending the cycle of violence, defusing regional tensions and preparing the way for the resumption of the peace process. We believe that implementation of these understandings in good faith will go a long way towards alleviating suffering and will create the necessary climate for achieving the goal of a just, comprehensive and durable peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and on other relevant understandings.

There is general recognition that, together with political support for the peace process, there is a need to focus on the multifaceted tasks of nation-building. The fledgling Palestinian Authority requires generous assistance, particularly in the fields of health, education, human resources development and creation of employment. Infrastructure development is an area of critical importance. The challenges confronting the people of Palestine are also challenges for the international community, and they merit its urgent attention and support. Regional cooperation, complemented by international efforts, is a prerequisite for enhancing peace and prosperity in the region.

India will continue, within our resource constraints, to extend material and technical assistance to the people of Palestine to consolidate their progress towards self-government and nation-building. We seek to assist the Palestinian people through scholarships and exchange programmes. We offered more than 189 specialized training slots during the period 1996 to 2000, at an estimated cost of 16.4 million rupees. India also pledged $1 million each at the Washington donors conference in October 1995, at the subsequent Paris pledging conference in January 1996 and at the third donors conference, held at Washington on 30 November 1998. A portion of that amount went towards construction of a library-cum-activity centre at Palestine Technical College and a library building at Al-Azher University in Gaza. During his recent visit to Palestine on 30 June 2000, the External Affairs Minister of India, Shri Jaswant Singh, inaugurated those facilities.

While the international community must assist in realizing the cherished objective of peace and

prosperity in the region, the actual impetus for a permanent and lasting solution will have to come from the parties themselves. We trust that the wisdom and sagacity displayed, resulting in momentum towards peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence, will continue to guide future negotiations. We trust in a successful and just outcome.

Mr. Aboulgheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): On this very date in 1947 the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (III), which changed the course of Middle East history. It partitioned British-mandate Palestine into two States, one Arab and the other Jewish, and established a separate regime for the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Today, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we recall, with the rest of the world, that the Palestinian people, despite dozens of resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, is still deprived of its natural right to self-determination and the establishment of its independent State on its own territory. The fact that the General Assembly considers this item annually reminds us all of the historic responsibility that the United Nations bears vis-à-vis the question of Palestine in all its aspects. This question will be solved only by reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes this year at a time of serious events, with the Palestinian people facing a real crisis, and with a continuing deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. These bloody events reflect the Palestinian people's aggravated feelings of despair and frustration, because the peace process has been stumbling as a result of Israel's failure to respect the pledges made in the agreed accords. In addition, occupation and Israeli settlement activities continue, bringing frustration because of proposals that would lead only to a flawed and unjust settlement that ignores the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principles of the peace process, particularly in relation to Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The international community understands more than ever that the Palestinian question represents the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that, without reaching a just and comprehensive settlement to this question, the Middle East, despite its strategic importance for the whole world, will continue to be a hotbed of tension and instability.

Egypt is fully confident that the international community, as represented in the General Assembly, understands that the Palestinian people needs our solidarity now more than ever before, and our support for its steadfastness in the face of excessive and unjustifiable use of military force by the Israeli military, economic siege and blockade and Israeli policies of closure and isolation, in violation of its international obligations as an occupying Power.

On 20 November 2000, Egypt recalled its Ambassador from Tel Aviv in the wake of the unacceptable, unprecedented and unjustifiable escalation of the Israeli bombardment campaign against Palestinian Government buildings and facilities in the Gaza Strip. Egypt took this measure in order to send a clear and decisive message to Israel that Egypt would not stand still in the face of such intensive and arrogant use of military force against the Palestinian people, its institutions and its property. On the other hand, Egypt has taken note of measures that Israel said it would implement during the month of Ramadan to alleviate the humanitarian situation, the siege, the closings and their detrimental impact on the economic and social condition of the Palestinian people.

Egypt looks forward to Israel's full implementation of what was agreed upon in Sharm El-Sheikh, namely, total withdrawal of all heavy weapons from areas under the Palestinian Authority and other areas in which Israel is not allowed to be present, as well as immediate cessation of the use of military force against Palestinian civilians.

No fair-minded person can ignore the detrimental effect of Israeli settlement activities on the Palestinians' status, security, national aspirations and hope to establish their independent State. Regrettably, and rather disturbingly, the Israeli Government has provided full support in words and deeds to the illegal and illegitimate position of Israeli settlers in the occupied Palestinian territories. Their provocative, aggressive and unacceptable behaviour is in contravention of all relevant United Nations resolutions and of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits the occupying Power from, among other things, transferring its civilian citizens to the lands that it occupies. Regrettably, this support that Israel provides to the settlers can be seen only as an attempt to consolidate the fait accompli, which renders meaningless and ineffective all serious negotiations

This impedes the course of negotiations and the achievement of a final status settlement by offering unacceptable options to the Palestinians.

In any case, Egypt feels that the continuation of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory has a detrimental effect on the peace process as a whole. In this light, it is impossible to talk about establishing a true peace in the Middle East.

My delegation continues to repeat that East Jerusalem is an occupied territory. This is the true reality of international legitimacy, as manifested in all relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 465 (1980) and 478 (1980), as well as General Assembly resolutions and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In the last six months, serious events have occurred, starting with the second Camp David negotiations last July and continuing with the provocative visit of the leader of the Israeli opposition party to the plaza of Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Subsequent events and violent incidents and the complete deterioration of the security situation gave rise to the total solidarity of Arab and Islamic communities with the Palestinian people in their suffering and aspirations. Those who have followed these developments have understood the great importance attached to the issue of Palestinian East Jerusalem in general and to the issue of sovereignty over Al-Haram Al-Sharif in particular. These issues must be taken into consideration in the final status negotiations on the Palestinian track. Any potential resolutions of Palestinian-Israeli issues must be adapted to take into account the central importance attached to these two issues.

The issue of Palestinian refugees — the longest-standing refugee issue in the world — can be settled on the basis of justice, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and subsequent resolutions, all of which give Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homes and the right to compensation if they choose not to return. Egypt wishes here to warn of the consequences of ignoring the resolutions of international legitimacy regarding this very important humanitarian issue.

The present status of the Palestinian question and the endeavours to bring about a settlement require the international community and all sincere parties, in their efforts to achieve a just and comprehensive settlement, to stand together decisively in order to realize the following main elements.

First, Israel must stop immediately all provocative measures and unjustifiable use of force in dealing with the Palestinian people. Palestinians feel tremendous frustration because of Israeli practices that have been going on now for more than 33 years of occupation.

Secondly, as soon as acts of violence cease, all the parties should implement the letter of the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum and understandings and make serious new efforts to bring about a settlement based on the following points that were agreed upon internationally: first, the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to the establishment of their national State on their own territory on the basis of their will and legitimate authority; secondly, total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories and the dismantling of the Israeli settlements that have been erected in the middle of the Palestinian territories; thirdly, giving the fledgling Palestinian State the opportunity to participate at the international, regional and local levels without pressures or restrictions; fourthly, reaching security arrangements that can provide security and stability for both parties, without any attempts to gain privileges based on the present occupation of Palestinian territories.

Finally, we had hoped that consideration of the agenda item on the Palestinian question at this session would be the culmination of long years of General Assembly consideration of this item. Regrettably, Israel has refused and insists on prolonging the suffering of the Palestinian people and the time needed to achieve that people's national aspirations and hopes.

Despite all this, there is still hope. The Palestinian State will be established soon, and the Palestinian people will be able to realize their national dream, for which they have waited so long.

Egypt will continue to support Palestine and its people, who have so much potential, until the Palestinian people fully attain all their legitimate national rights.

Mr. Sai (Algeria) *(spoke in Arabic)*: I am delighted to have this opportunity to make a statement in place of Ambassador Abdallah Baali, who is unable to attend this meeting.

We again have the opportunity to discuss the question of Palestine, an issue that has been on the General Assembly's agenda since 1947. This issue has become perhaps the longest-standing issue ever to be discussed in the Assembly. The question of Palestine is almost as old as the Organization itself, and it has been a source of concern within the United Nations — in the General Assembly, the Security Council and in other United Nations bodies — since 1947.

What the Palestinian people are going through today in the occupied Arab territories touches the conscience of the entire world. As the whole world has witnessed, daily tragedies are besetting Palestinian children and people who are courageously facing the occupying Israeli forces. Since 28 September we have seen the reaction to the visit to the plaza of Al-Haram Al-Sharif by the leader of the Israeli extreme right, Mr. Sharon. Since that visit the Palestinian territories have experienced a courageous popular uprising, giving voice to the refusal of the Palestinian masses to accept occupation and loudly protesting any attack on the sacred places of Islam. Their Arab brethren have reacted as one, in full solidarity with their aspirations and rights and in protest against Israeli practices.

As the occupying Power, Israel followed a policy of brutal oppression in an effort to stamp out the intifada. In doing so, Israel used all sorts of weaponry — including tanks and helicopter gunships — against children armed only with stones to resist the occupation. As a result, over 300 persons were killed and ten thousand injured. The vast majority of those killed or injured were Palestinians, at least one third of them children.

After more than two months of confrontation, we can see from the reports of humanitarian organizations exactly how dangerous the events in Palestine are for both Palestinians and the region at large. The Palestinian people are paying too high a price, especially given the fact that the occupying Power has decided to sever all economic activities with Palestinians, thereby condemning hundreds of thousands of people to penury by depriving them of daily jobs in Israel. Israeli authorities allow their own convoys free movement and — under the benevolent eyes of the occupying army — are letting them carry out military manoeuvres on Palestinian territory.

Many resolutions have been adopted with regard to this issue. Among them is General Assembly resolution 181 (II), which states that the Palestinian people have the right to their own independent State. In addition, various relevant Security Council resolutions make it quite clear that no Power has the right to occupy any territory by force. The international community found that it was necessary to take action to end this crisis situation in order to ensure that it did not spread and to protect the Palestinian people from the attacks of the occupying forces. The Security Council decided that there was a need to end the violence in occupied Palestinian territories, and condemned the excessive use of force against the Palestinian people. This issue also found support in the Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session last October. The Assembly concluded that this was a matter of human rights. There was also total support in the Economic and Social Council for a draft resolution to authorize the sending of a committee of inquiry to investigate crimes committed by the Israeli army against Palestinian citizens.

Given the daily bloody events in occupied Palestine, it can be said, at the very least, that the Middle East peace process has lost all credibility, as one of the parties to the conflict has turned its back on its previous commitments. Given that state of affairs, there can be no doubt that Israel alone is responsible for the region's return to tension and violence as a result of the provocation against the conscience and religious sentiments of Palestinians and Arabs.

A strategic choice had been made to establish comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the principle of land for peace and the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination — a choice reiterated during Arab and Islamic summit meetings held in Cairo and Doha last month. At those meetings, a precondition was established that any peace should be a true peace and not a peace gained at any price. There are inviolable and immutable Arab and Islamic principles at stake.

At this crucial stage in their history, the Palestinian people need more than ever before the efforts of their faithful friends and of those who long for peace. They also need support and assistance in various fields, including the political, financial and economic fields. As the overall representative of the international community, the United Nations has a particular responsibility towards the Palestinian people. This is particularly true in the light of the resolution adopted by the United Nations in 1947, which provided for the establishment of two independent States on

Palestinian territory. Fifty-three years have passed since the adoption of that resolution, and the United Nations is still being asked to allow the establishment of an independent, legitimate and national Palestinian State. That is a right no one can dispute.

We must therefore find a solution to this problematic question. The United Nations could in fact establish the necessary basis for a solution, thereby making it possible for us to make a breakthrough and settle this matter. We hear repeatedly of the rights of Palestinians to self-determination and to live in peace within an independent country. The United Nations should be advocating those rights today more than ever before, through both the General Assembly and its other bodies. In particular, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People should be doing everything possible to further this just cause.

In the short term, the United Nations should adopt as soon as possible practical proposals to provide immediate protection for the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation. That should be done by setting up a protection force and deploying an international observer mission under the aegis of the Organization. The United Nations should also send a fact-finding committee to the Palestinian territories in order to investigate the suffering of the Palestinian people under the occupation.

The international community has an important and essential role to play today in the Palestinian territories if we are indeed to achieve comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, a peace that is consonant with international law and that allows the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their own independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. That role must also be played if we are to pressure Israel to respect its international commitments, put an end to its policy of aggression, dismantle its illegal settlements on Palestinian land, and allow Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, in conformity with international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Israel should be forced to end its occupation of the Syrian Golan today, and to withdraw fully from southern Lebanon, in keeping with international law and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

In a message of support addressed to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Republic of Algeria, reiterated the full support of the Algerian nation for the Palestinian people, particularly their right to live in peace within their own territory in the context of an independent state. He called upon the international community as a whole, and in particular the two co-sponsors of the peace process and other influential actors, to shoulder their responsibilities and to do all that is necessary to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Algeria, too, has known occupation. We, too, have suffered, and we know what it means for a people to long for independence and liberty. However great the oppression against a nation, it will continue to long for freedom. We will do everything we can to ensure that no place is lost, however many claims there are on its territory. That is why we have recognized the Palestinian state since it was declared in Algeria on 15 November 1988.

Mr. Ould Deddach (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): We have gathered here today to consider the question of Palestine under agenda item 41.

More than three hundred martyrs have already fallen, and thousands have been wounded, in the wake of the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Reports carried by the international media since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada on the shooting of unarmed civilians, the use of artillery, helicopter gunships and rockets, and the indiscriminate destruction of property, attest to the serious and flagrant nature of these violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War.

The Mauritanian people and Government express their full and absolute solidarity with the Palestinian people. They pay tribute to the martyrs who have fallen, not only in defence of the legitimate and sacred Palestinian rights, but also in defence of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the rights of the Arab and Islamic nations.

The Security Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000) on 7 October 2000, which called for a cessation of all acts of violence and the establishment of a fact-finding committee to bring to justice all those

responsible for these actions. That resolution reflected the position of the international community and international public opinion. However, violence, killing and deliberate attacks against innocent Palestinians continue.

The holding of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit on 16 and 17 October last also represented a serious attempt to stabilize the situation and to return to the peace process, in implementation of resolution 1322 (2000). In this context, we would like to express our appreciation for the efforts of Egypt, the host country of that summit, and those of its President, Mr. Hosni Mubarak. We would like also to thank the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for all his efforts to calm the situation and to hold that summit.

That summit was followed by the Arab summit, which called for the cessation of violence and a return to the negotiating table, with a view to reviving the peace process. Despite all these international efforts and resolutions, the killing and bombing of unarmed Palestinians continued.

Today more than ever the international community is called upon to support the Security Council and international legitimacy on the question of Palestine. In this regard, we believe that the Security Council should send an observer force to protect the Palestinian people.

Mauritania, proceeding from its national principles and from the extreme importance it attaches to Arab and Islamic issues, will never change its stance. In this respect, we reiterate our support for all relevant resolutions on the sacred question of Palestine, especially Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the return of refugees.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The question of Palestine has again prompted the General Assembly to convene. Exactly two months ago, Israel began this most recent chapter in its long history of acts of aggression against the heroic people of Palestine. More than 200 unarmed civilians have died, and over 11,000 people have been wounded.

Losses to the Palestinian economy during this period, according to conservative estimates, have exceeded $1 billion. The suffering of the Palestinian families in mourning and the pain of the mothers of Palestinian children killed by Israeli violence has been incalculable.

We note with deep concern that despite the many calls for an end to the violence, Israel nonetheless is continuing to escalate its aggression, which is further diminishing the possibility of a just and lasting peace in the region. Israel has again flagrantly contravened the many relevant resolutions on the question of Palestine adopted by the General Assembly, the Security Council, the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, and the Commission on Human Rights. Furthermore, it is flouting the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and international humanitarian law. The international community wants to know why the United Nations cannot act to put an end to the bloodshed and the loss of human lives.

The General Assembly can and must make a decisive contribution to revitalizing the peace process in the Middle East, since the Security Council has failed to do so because of regrettable shortcomings in its functioning.

The main reason for that failure of the Security Council is a secret to no one. The double standard, the lack of democracy and transparency, the obsolete privilege of the veto and the even more insulting threat of its use are standard features of the Security Council's work. Supported by the United States, these realities led to the impunity with which Israel has acted all these years.

My delegation is honoured to be a co-sponsor again this year of the four draft resolutions introduced under agenda item 41 on the question of Palestine and feels that the updates and additions that have been made to the texts will enhance understanding of these issues. Cuba, as it has customarily done, will vote in favour of the draft resolutions and hopes that they will enjoy the traditional support of the vast majority of delegations.

The time has come to demand that Israel comply with all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which assuredly mark the road to peace. The time has come to call for compliance with Security Council resolution 1322 (2000), recently adopted thanks to the strenuous efforts of the caucus of non-aligned States.

The General Assembly must act decisively. More innocent people are dying with every passing minute. We must be able to adopt effective measures to reopen the path to peace, prevent continued aggression and

lead to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It is high time to deploy an international force to protect Palestinian civilians, in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

Cuba condemns Israeli acts of aggression and reaffirms its firm and unswerving solidarity with the Palestinian people in its struggle to establish an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and for the return of all occupied Arab territories. We are convinced that only resolute action on the part of the international community can save the negotiating process and promote the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Umelo (Nigeria): My delegation would like to thank you, Sir, for the opportunity to present our views on the question of Palestine in this meeting of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. Indeed, the question of Palestine has remained one of the most intractable international problems on the agenda of the United Nations. The General Assembly has dealt with it since 1948 and efforts to find a lasting solution to the problem have yet to provide a comprehensive solution.

Permit me to recall that the General Assembly over the years has adopted several resolutions and decisions with a view to providing a solution to the crisis, but all to no avail. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, the 1991 Oslo accords, the 1998 Wye River Memorandum and the current initiatives of Secretary-General Kofi Annan are but a few of the various efforts at resolving this crisis. Yet, it would appear that all our efforts have come to naught as the crisis seems to have defied all solutions. This is in spite of the fact that the numerous conferences and diplomatic initiatives have provided formulas for achieving a just and lasting peace.

The Palestinian question is multifaceted, as the issues involved range from political, military, legal and humanitarian to human rights questions. However, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains a knotty issue in the complex negotiations towards resolving the crisis. This is often the cause of the violence and what has now become the culture of killings that have come to mark Israeli-Palestinian relations. The latest of such orgies of violence is the current crisis, which began on 28 September 2000 over the desecration of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and other holy places in Jerusalem, as well as in the occupied Palestinian territory. This latest crisis has claimed over 356 lives since its inception, consisting of a preponderance of Palestinians and including Israeli Jews and Arabs. My delegation believes that the need for a peaceful settlement to this conflict has never been stronger than now.

The international community, as well as the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, must demonstrate the necessary political will to stop these orgies of violence and return to the negotiating table. In this regard, my delegation supports the initiatives of the Secretary-General, as stated in his report presented to the General Assembly on 20 October 2000. We commend the Secretary-General for his timely intervention in the latest crisis and his facilitation of the understanding reached at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit. In addition, we wish to commend the efforts of President Bill Clinton of the United States of America for the efforts he has deployed and continues to deploy towards finding a lasting solution to this intractable problem.

Nigeria believes in the urgent need for and value of a negotiated settlement. We therefore urge the leaders of Israel and Palestine to embrace peaceful negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 338 (1973) and 242 (1967), which we believe provide a fair and just basis for the resolution of the crisis. Furthermore, we wish to support the decisions of the emergency special session of the General Assembly on 20 October this year, which called on Israel to abide by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilian persons in time of war. It is therefore our hope that Israel will stop the use of gunboat helicopters to attack the defenceless Palestinian civilian population.

We wish in this connection to recall General Assembly resolution 54/230 of 1999 and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, 338 (1973) of 22 October 1973 and 425 (1978) of 19 March 1978, and to express the hope that the principle of land for peace will be concluded as envisaged in these resolutions.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reaffirm its support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the natural resources in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem. We therefore call on Israel not to cause the

loss or depletion of or to endanger the natural resources in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In conclusion, my delegation wishes to commend the efforts of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Mr. Peter Hansen, for the valuable services his organization has been rendering to alleviate the poor conditions of the Palestinian refugees, who are the real victims of this crisis. My delegation further appreciates the enormous challenge facing the leaders of Israel and Palestine in their quest for a viable and just solution to the crisis.

We would like also to underscore the great need for peace, which is so vital for the development of their society. We therefore urge both parties to seek the path of peace rather than continue to wallow in this unfortunate cycle of violence and conflict.

Programme of work

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I should like to inform members that consultations are ongoing concerning the request by several countries, contained in document A/55/238, for the inclusion in the agenda of the current session of an additional item entitled "Proclamation of 31 August as the International Day of Solidarity".

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.